

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT--PARA FOUR)

DEPT PASS JAKARTA AND SINGAPORE

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: SENV, ID, IN, SN, SB, SD, SC

SUBJECT: SEALIFT MEDITERRANEAN GROUNDING

REF: MEDAN 857

1. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION CONCERNING THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE GROUNDING OF A US SHIP, SEALIFT MEDITERRANEAN, OFF THE COAST OF NORTHERN SUMATRA WAS PROVIDED BY THE NAVY INVESTIGATIVE OFFICER, CDR D. E. MORIN OF COMSCFE (SEALIFT COMMAND) YOKOHAMA, AND BY THE FORMER CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP, WILLIAM E. BOONAI, NOW RECUPERATING IN A MEDAN HOSPITAL FROM A HEART ATTACK SUFFERED AFTER THE SHIP WENT AGROUND. SINCE THIS INFORMATION WILL BE FOR THE PRESENT TIGHTLY HELD BY THE NAVY PENDING COMPLETION OF ITS INVESTIGATION AND DETERMINATION OF ANY SUBSEQUENT DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE SHIP'S CREW, WE ARE SUBMITTING IT ON AN FYI BASIS FOR STATE ONLY. AT THE REQUEST OF CDR MORIN, CONSUL SAT IN ON THE DEBRIEFING OF CAPTAIN COONAN. THE CAPTAIN IS STILL VERY WEAK BUT APPEARED REASONABLY ALERT, AND CERTAINLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COOPERATIVE, IN ANSWERING MORIN'S QUESTIONS.

2. THE OIL TANKER, SEALIFT MEDITERRANEAN, WITH A FULL LOAD WAS ON ITS WAY FROM COLOMBO SRI LANKA TO SUBIC BAY IN THE PHILIPPINES. ACCORDING TO INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE ORIGINAL PHONE CALL TO THE CONSULATE ABOUT THE SHIP'S PLIGHT, THE SHIP WAS CARRYING 180 MILLION BARRELS, OF WHICH AN ESTIMATED FIVE THOUSAND

HAD LEAKED OUT. THE SHIP WNT AGROUND NEAR RONDO ISLAND OFF THE NORTH COAST OF SUMATRA APRIL 2 AT 0606 HOURS. CAPTAIN SAID HE CAME UP TO THE BRIDGE AROUND 0600 AS WAS HIS NORMAL HABIT. HIS CHIEF MATE REPORTED A STRONG CURRENT FOR WHICH HE WAS TAKING CORRECTIVE ACTION OF SETTING THE COURSE. THE CAPTAIN SAID HE HAD COMPLETE CONFIDENCE IN HIS CHIEF MATE AND DID NOT ORDER ANY OF THE COURSE CHANGES NOR PARTICIPATE IN THE NAVIGATION OF THE SHIP PRIOR TO THE GROUNDING. HE NOTICED NOTHING TO INDICATE ANY PARTICULAR DANGER. VISIBILITY WAS CLEAR AND THERE WERE NO ROCKS IN THE NEAR VICINITY OF THE SHIP. HE COULD SEE RONDO ISLAND TO PORT (RONDO ISLAND IS ABOUT 500 FEET HIGH). HE WAS THEREFORE TOTALLY SURPRISED WHEN HE FELT THE BUMP INDICATING THE SHIP WAS GROUNDED. HIS IMMEDIATE CONCERN, HR RECOUNTED, WAS THE POSSIBILITY OF POLLUTION AND HE SOUGHT TO GET THE SHIP CLEAR OF LAND. THEREAFTER, HOWEVER, HE BECAME CONCERNED FOR THE WELFARE OF THE CREW - FELT THE SHIP LIGHTS SINK AND HEADED TOWARD LAND AGAIN. THE CAPTAIN DOES NOT REMEMBER ANY DETAILS AFTER THSI NOR DOES HE RECALL BECOMING ILL OR BEING EVACUATED APRIL 4 BY HELICOPTER TO MEDAN.

3. IT WAS THE CAPTAIN'S CONCLUSION THAT THE CURRENTS MUST HAVE BEEN STRONG, SETTING THE SHIP TOWARD RONDO ISLAND (AND ON TO THE ROCK SHOULDER AROUND THE ISLAND). (NOTE: CONSULATE CAN AFFIRM THAT WATERS OFF COAST OF NORTH SUMATRA ARE WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR STRONG CURRENTS AND HEAVY WAVE ACTION.) CDR MORIN HAVING JUST SPENT FOUR DAYS AT THE SHIP TENDED TO THINK, TOO, THAT A STRONG CURRENT FOR WHICH CORRECTIVE ACTION WAS NOT TAKEN IN TIME IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ADJUSTING THE SHIP COURSE WAS THE PROBABLE CAUSE OF THE GROUNDING.

4. THE SHIP HULL REPORTEDLY HAD PARALLEL HOLING ALL ALONG ITS SIDE, SUGGESTING TWO UNDER WATER ROCKS OR PINNACLES CAUSED THE DAMAGE. WATER POURED INTO THE PUMP ROOM UP TO TEN FEET FROM THE TOP BEFORE IT WAS STOPPED. CDR MORIN CREDITS THE CHIEF ENGINEER AND OTHER MEMBERS OF CREW IN DOING A SUPERIOR JOB IN TAKING CORRECTIVE ACTION TO PREVENT THE SHIPS TOTAL DEMISE.

5. CDR MORIN REPORTED THAT THE SHIP HAS BEEN EMPTIED OF ITS OIL CARGO AND WILL BE TOWED DRY TO SINGAPORE, ARRIVING SINGAPORE APPROXIMATELY APRIL 23. IT WILL BE DRY DOCKED THERE FOR FURTHER REPAIRS.

6. CDR MORIN INDICATED THAT THE US COAST GUARD HAD NOT LAUNCHED AN INVESTIGATION ON THE GROUNDING YET. NO DECISION ON THEIR MAKING AN INVESTIGATION WILL BE MADE UNTIL THE SHIP IS IN SINGAPORE. THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THE COAST GUARD MAY DECIDE AGAINST DOING IT SINCE THIS INCIDENT DID NOT INVOLVE ANY DEATHS AND DID NOT INVOLVE TWO SHIPS.

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